Wrongs of Married Men...

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WRONGS OF MARRIED MEN,

And Other Essays,

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Wrongs of Married Men.

The circumstances relating to marriage are becoming so confused and anomalous that a re-casting of the laws pertaining to it must soon be universally demanded. At present married people scarcely know where they are. The daily papers constantly give most pathetic accounts of injured husbands in humble life resorting to police-magistrates for assistance or advice, and finding that they have no remedy against the misconduct of their worthless partners. We have not been sparing, from time to time, in enumerating the wrongs of women. But the men have theirs also, to a less degree, and it is only equitable that attention should be drawn to them, for justice and fair play should be given to all. We have never demanded that women should have any privileges denied to men.

Not long ago when the law gave the husband sole control of the wife's unsettled property, it was right that he should be liable for her maintenance. But when, as now, a married woman retains her own, the reason for compelling maintenance from the husband has disappeared. She may have a good house and a good income, and, from caprice or other cause, may deny him admittance to his married home and to any share of her living. If destitute, he may go to the workhouse, while she is living in luxury, and no claim can be made upon her for his sustenance. But reverse the positions and the husband will be compelled to allow her a maintenance. This system falls hardest on the poorest. It is not uncommon for a police-magistrate to order a working man to contribute twelve shil-

lings a week, or more, to the support of a separated wife. Few men of such a class can do this and live.

Again, since the Jackson case, no husband can compel an unwilling wife to cohabit with him. Of course this is right enough. But, on the other hand, a wife can compel an unwilling husband, by a judge's order, to restore her to cohabitation or pay the penalty of refusal. This seems an unfair distinction. If a husband neglect his wife and family so that it become constructive cruelty, the wife can obtain a separation order without so much as the asking. But a wife may spend her days in dissipation, may frequent public-houses, and neglect her children, and the husband has neither remedy nor power to prevent her.

The wife may be a nagger, a scold, a perpetual tormentor—one of the class whom our humorous and practical forefathers cured by the application of to ducking-stool and a horse-pond—she may be guilty of any misconduct short of adultery, and the unfortunate husband must put up with it all. Many such fly for refuge to the nearest tavern, and drown their misery in drink, and often become criminal from their misfortune. Many an honest, hard-working man, too, is punished by the magistrates because, in his absence from home, his wife neglected her duties and kept his children from school. If the fines are not paid, it is he who is imprisoned, and not the culprit wife.

Widows can claim one-third of the personalty of husbands dying intestate, but widowers have only a life-interest in the unwilled property of deceased wives.

As a rule the husband has to work hard to maintain his wife and family, but, however humble their circumstances may be, the wife can, if she will, be as idle as she please, and her husband has no remedy. The law will punish him for his neglect, but not her for hers. Formerly he could castigate her; now he must not so much as threaten. A working man complains to a magistrate that his wife neglects to get his meals, and, when she should be tidying

his home, spends her time gossiping in a public-house. "Very sorry," replies the magistrate, "but I can do nothing for you. You have taken her for better or worse; you must grin and bear it." He refuses, and leaves her, and she straightway obtains a maintenance order against him. But would not easy, cheap, and swift divorce be a fairer and more sensible mode of settling their difficulty? Ought the law to compel people to commit adultery before they can obtain it?

These are some of the wrongs under which married men suffer owing to the radical changes which have taken place in the relations of husband and wife since marriage was made a religious sacrament. A more rational perception of its nature, however, is beginning to prevail, and it is time that all these and other anomalies should cease. The religious idea of its character must give way. Marriage will have to be thoroughly reconstructed on the basis of a civil partnership, terminable at will, or from breach of contract, as in other associations. Even time partnerships, to lapse at the end of a term—say seven or any other number of years to be agreed upon—would be better than the haphazard, happy-go-lucky system now in vogue. These, if agreeable, could be renewed or continued at the will of both. As Mr. Labouchere has just said in the House of Commons, the law of divorce is utterly absurd. "If two people," he added, "wanted to be married, let them be married, and if they want to be divorced, let them be divorced." Although these opinions were greeted with much laughter by the House, as though they were excessively funny, they were nevertheless correct, and domestic happiness will never be universal until they be received as serious truths. Should there be children of those separated, it would be a simple matter to compel parents to set aside a sum for their support in a ratio according to the individual property of each. This would put an end to the filthy acounts of divorce suits which pollute our daily papers, and obtain ready admittance into families where a serious

essay on manners and morals is often excluded because it contains a little necessary plain speaking—as though omelettes could be expected without breaking eggs.

If people could divorce themselves at will and without publicity they would be as careful to preserve each other's esteem after, as they were before marriage. We should then seldom see what so frequently happens now; the charming, neat, obliging, fiancee, developing into the giddy, careless slatternly, and dis-obliging wife, or the ardent and devoted lover cooling down into the neglectful and heartless husband. Those truly married would continue to do all they could to please each other; and those superficially united would practice the outward decencies of married life from mutual and self interests. Marriage would cease to be the grave of love, and the sum total of human happiness would be immensely increased. Possession during good behaviour is far better for our weak human nature than possession absolute. In the state of Illinois, where divorce is as easy as possible, only one couple in seven resort to it including strangers who visit there for the purpose, so that of the inhabitants, perhaps not more than one in fourteen couples, or one person in twenty-eight, desire to break through the marriage bond. The nature of marriage would be elevated by bringing it as nearly as possible to a condition of mutual satisfaction. Morality would be increased through it. All that are required to effect these ends are: equal conditions of partnership, civil contract, and easy method of separation.

Marriage Morals.

It is an old saying, that nothing makes or mars a man like marriage. And the saying is true, for we all agreed that marriage draws after it inevitable consequences, and those who marry in haste are left to repent at leisure, because it is thought to be in no one's power to help them. Another proverb tells us that marriages are made in heaven, but this is not in favor with match-making mothers, who think they can manage these delicate matters a great deal better than Providence. When a man is about to choose a companion for life, he certainly does well to consider that he is taking a very serious step; and it must be admitted that, if we except our common sailors, who have singularly loose notions on the subject, marriage is regarded by every class of the American people as a thing not to be lightly entered on. The chief reason of this is, that marriage still exihibits itself, even to the Protestant mind, in a quasi-sacramental dress; the next is, that the obstacles to divorce are much more formidable than formerly. Subordinate to these is a third reason, operating largely with that section of the community which occupies a middle place between the plutocracy and the masses—I mean the possibility of having to provide for a numerous family. If there is one thing which more than another is thought to be out of the sphere of calculation, it is the number of "hostages to fortune" which a man who marries will be called upon to give. "Leave such vaticinations," says Mrs. Grundy, "to the

astrologers or the gipsies; you will have as many children as are good for you, neither more nor less."

And yes, in spite of all that is implied to the contrary, in the ordinary parlance of the day, there is nothing, if we reflect on it, for which we are more responsible than the reproduction of our own species. All but absolute fatalists must admit that it is open to men and women to abstain from marriage altogether, or to put it off for an indefinite number of years. Opinions may differ on the question whether prolonged celibacy is or is not a good thing, but no one can doubt that the state itself is, at all events with the male sex, the result of free choice. It is a little wonderful, therefore, to find thousands of married persons manifestly holding it to be their duty to bring into the world as many children as possible, while no one thinks of blaming those who remain single for not furthering the multiplication of mankind. But this is only one inconsistency. The strangest of all is, that it seems to be taken for granted that marriage once entered upon, all control over ourselves not only ceases, but ought to cease; and that, instead of the conjugal relations being subject to regulative laws, husbands and wives have no standard of morality corresponding to that which is set up for the government of other folk.

The time has arrived when it has become necessary to use plain speech on this matter, and I, for one, can no longer hesitate to avow my belief that this last view of marriage is not only vicious in principle, but often fraught with the most mischievous consequences. For what does it amount to? First, it involves a break in the education of Humanity, which is incompatible with the continuity of moral growth, and has no parallel in the processes of development of the physical world. Secondly, as held by the middle and upper middle classes, it means that man is free up to a certain point in his career; free, that is, to choose his own vocation, to work out the best part of himself, to enlarge his experience by travel, to recreate his strength by leisure, to store his mind with

varied knowledge; but that when he marries he surrenders this freedom utterly, embarks on an unknown sea, exposes his fair hopes to shipwreck, here and there has to exhaust all his energies in the toil and stress of life—in a word, becomes a victim to new circumstances, against which it is vain for him to struggle. Is there one of us who can not call to mind a dozen instances of this kind among our acquaintance? Look at the poor married clergymen, whose families have passed into a proverb. Twenty-five years ago, the man whose hair is now silvering with premature age had a reputation in his college, was enthusiastic in the cause of science, conspicuous for general culture, promised many brilliant things; since then he has had ten children, for whose education (all he had to give them) he has overtaxed his powers till he has sunk to the level of his own drudgery, and his mind has become the mind of a pedagogue. His friends are at a loss whether to pity or to praise him most. "Excellent fellow!" they exclaim, "but he has been sorely weighted in the race of life. To put out so many boys in the world is too much for any man." So is walking thirty miles a day up a hill for ten successive days, or any other similar self-imposed task; and if we do survive the achievement, where is the glory if it leaves us at the finish but the wreck of our proper selves? We may, perhaps, have learned some virtues in the process, such as patience, resignation, the habit of sustained effort; but these we could have made our own equally well in other paths of life, gladdened by grander glimpses of Nature's universe, as helps to lift our hearts. What right has any one of us deliberately to narrow his own intellectual horizon, any more than to cut off his right hand or put out one of his eyes?

If we turn from the husband to the wife. the prospect is often still more melancholy, and this from the very fact that it is not considered either by herself or those around her to call for any particular sympathy. I pass by the recurrence of her physical suffering, the months of dreary outlook, uncrowned by any ade-

quate reward when they only result in adding a fresh term to a series already too long. I pass by the heedless risking of the matured and more valuable life for one whose approach was no signal for joy, and whose chance of foothold, now that he has come, is openly acknowledged, by those who love him best, to be too faint for speculation. The unnecessary multiplication of children causes greater disasters than these, although not so patent to the superficial observer. It tends to arrest the education of the married woman at its most critical stage, and, by absorbing her whole attention, renders her incapable of fulfilling duties for which she might be otherwise fit, or might easily fit herself. Society, it is true, does not require a wife to be much more than the head domestic of her establishment, and if her nursery is full, it commonly permits her head to be empty. Where this is the case, the germ of the mischief may be dormant for a time, but the day inevitably comes when it springs into life, and the children have forced upon them the painful consciousness that they have outgrown at least one of their parents. Who shall say whether the maternal influence has not in that awakening received its death-blow? "A foolish son," says Solomon, "is a heaviness to his mother." It is equally true that a foolish mother is lightly esteemed by her son.

It can not but be that both sexes should suffer when either transgresses the due limits which it is in the power of each to observe; but the deterioration which the woman undergoes in the process is far greater than that of the man. Everybody admits that this is true of the single state, but it is not less true of the married, and, indeed, has a wider application there; for, whereas the enlarged sense of responsibility which an increasing family creates may act on the father as a spur to greater exertion, the concentration of the mother's whole being on the details of the domestic drama grows, and must grow, with each new birth, until, at last, her daily life becomes one theater of trivialities, the curtain of which is never allowed to drop. Nor, usually, would she have it

otherwise. Sufficient for her if the teething is not abnormally troublesome, or the pleasing variation of the measles and whooping-cough does not recur too frequently. Life for her has only two practical sides, maternity and the management of her household. The higher education of women, she remarks, may be a capital theme for learned spinsters to descant upon, but, she adds, with a complacent sneer, these advanced females will soon sober down when they have had half-a-dozen babies. Inquire her views on any of the topics of the day, her mind is either a blank, or, if intelligent, she catches up the last expression of her husband's opinion upon them, sometimes echoing his very words; ask her if she keeps up any of those interests which had so great a charm for her girlhood, she tells you she has never had a moment to spare since her marriage; will she play you that air of Beethoven which still, at the end of six years, lingers in your memory? She never touches the piano now.

Persons of this description earn among their admirers the title of motherly women, and any depreciation of them would be unjust if it were the plain duty of one generation to sacrifice itself to the next, or if the advantages to be gained by this sacrifice were such as to make it a legitimate one. But the first alternative is refuted by logic, and the second by experience. To suffer for the sake of posterity may, in individual cases, be self-devoton of the highest order; but to inculcate this as a general duty would be to promulgate the revolting doctrine, that the scheme of creation is one of progressive misery. The popular belief that fortune favors large families, is mainly due to the fact that when the members of them do passably well people at once begin to comment on it. The same amount of success with smaller numbers would attract no attention, or would be attributed to special oportunities. If the children are not to sink in the social scale below the position of their parents, they must, when numerous, bear a large amount of strain of mind or body, or both; and given a perfectly

healthy frame, this may do them no permanent harm. But the cases are few in which the frame is perfectly healthy, and then the hot-bed system of education, let parents ignore it as they may, is little short of ruinous. Can anything be more baleful to boys of ten or twelve years of age than to compel them to endure competitive examinations in all sorts of subjects with which it is impossible that they can have any real acquaintance? Yet this is what is required in nearly all our public schools before a boy can enter there. and every year scores of mere children are turned away overwhelmed with surprise at the exceeding bitterness of their first rebuff in life. It is strange that a boy should have to be crammed before he is taught, but this is now the recognized plan, and as complete an organization exists for the one purpose as for the other.

Moreover, in forecasting the fate of large families, there is one evil star which is no rare phenomenon in their horoscope. Account must be taken of the proportion of dullards that are born into the world—that is to say, of those who,being without natural gifts, find themselves outstripped by their more nimble-witted rivals, and who are left behind in despair, not so much at the defeat itself as at the contempt with which it is regarded by the on-lookers. There can, of course, be no race unless some one is beaten, and the advocates of universal competition are therefore bound to require that weakness and strength shall be ranged side by side at starting, if only by way of doing justice to their own pet theory. This is all very well so long as both weak and strong are "placed" somewhere at last; but we see every day that the weak not only go to the wall, but are cruelly squeezed when they get there. Who is to blame for this? The crowd that squeezes, or those that get the crowd together? And are we to acquit the originators of the fatal pressure, because they have acted unthinkingly or with that ignorant fanaticism that mistakes the indulgence of man's inclinations for the furtherance of nature's purposes?

But the lot of the boys is an enviable one compared with that of the girls, who being the more feeble, are unfortunately also the more plentiful. Granted that education in their case may be procured at a much cheaper rate; but when cheapness and inferiority go hand in hand, the purchaser gains little by his bargain. There never was, probably, a greater delusion in the world than the ordinary young ladies' school; and the flimsy accomplishments learned there, so far from accomplishing anything, are apt to evaporate after marriage as quickly as a blown soap-bubble. Nor can attendance later on at a few scientific lectures, even when the lady student condescends to take notes. supply radical defects of intellectual constitution, due partly to imperfect training, and partly to the mental tight lacing of catechismal formularies which impedes the circulation of new ideas. But let this pass for the moment as beside my present point. Improve the education of girls as you will, all can not be made self dependent, and, as things at present stand in America, a considerable number of them cannot possibly become wives. A more unhappy condition than that of a middle-aged spinster, cast adrift with no interest and no definite occupation, it is difficult to imagine. The institutions of the country can only provide work for a few. Others must seek their homes among strangers, where their presence is only tolerated for the sake of their purses, or become exotics in the establishments known as general boarding-houses, where the selfishness and eccentricity of the inmates are observed to increase directly with the time during which they have been "planted out."

Such are some of the miseries which flow from the excess of population in that section of the community which enjoys qualified independence, and goes by the name of the middle class. But this is a small portion of the people, and it is not until we apply the argument to the masses which underlie the whole fabric of society that we realize its supreme importance. It would not be difficult to show that to initiate limitation of numbers among those who

support themselves by manual labor would be to introduce the germ of nearly every social reform. and that without such limitation social reform can effect scarcely any permanent good. Take the case of the agricultural laborer, as the one which for the moment engrosses the largest share of public attention. What is the ultimate value of a rise in wages, whether extorted by means of an actual strike or wisely conceded before a strike has become practicable, if there is to be no limit to the family wants which the few extra shillings a week are destined to supply? Where is the room for sanitary legislation when cottages are overstocked with human life, and neither doctor nor clergyman thinks of telling the parents that in their utter recklessness of multiplication they are wronging both themselves and their offspring? To reply, as is sometimes plausibly done by the optimist, that if there are seven or eight children in the cottage, three are certain to be bread-winners, is only to reveal unconsciously the most malignant feature of the disease. To escape starvation, hundreds of boys and girls have had to spend in stone-picking and crow-clapping hours which, if rightly used, might have served, who knows? to color their entire after lives, now so uniformly gray and dull. Education Acts may interpose with the strong hand, and expel from rural districts the absolute nihilism of ignorance, but even now it is thought too much to insist that the system of oscillation between field-toil and the three R's should be replaced by a continuous cultivation of intelligence during the whole period of childhood.

Some few years ago the propriety of newspaper readers was greatly shocked at learning, for the first time, some of the domestic economies practiced by the farmers. That children of both sexes, fast growing up into men and women, should have but one sleeping apartment between them, or, as proved to be sometimes the case, should share that of their parents, was, of course, looked upon as intolerable. And it is fair to say that there is no farmer at all alive to the duties inseparable from property who does not now take care

that every new cottage he builds should have at least three bed rooms. But even where this accommodation is provided, there is often great difficulty in securing the end in view, and if the third bedroom is given up to the lodger for the sake of the few pence he brings, the mischief sought to be remedied is only heightened by the arrangement. It is impossible to guage the harm that may be done to any young girl, however naturally pure, by allowing her to become familiar with the coarser forms of life which it is part of the work of civilization to throw into the background, and it may be doubted whether respectability could ever hold its own but for the conventionalities with which it is fenced about. The maiden's best safeguard consists in her ignorance, which is here only another word for innocence, and when the rude scenes of her early days have done away with this, the risk which she runs when she goes into the world is intensified tenfold. The evil here glanced at will never be successfully grappled with until the cottager is taught that if it is his landlord's duty to afford him sufficient room for his family, it is no less his own to adjust his family to the room.

If what has been said is true of the country, it is also true of the town. There, however, the social problem is further complicated by the general conflict now raging between labor and capital. The disastrous result of over-population in our great centers of industry as far exceeds the inconveniences which arise from a plethora elsewhere, as the intelligence of a skilled mechanic does that of the hedger and ditcher.

If there is no remedy for the distress and discontent which meet us at every turn but the form of prudential check first insisted on by Malthus in his famous Essay on Population, we had best yield to our fate with as much resignation as we can muster. For Malthus offered man only two alternatives, between which he held it a plain duty for him to choose: either total abjuration of marriage. or its postponement, however long, until means of subsistence should have been secured sufficiently ample to render future penury

impossible. Lofty precepts such as these, for lofty they assuredly were, were at once condemned as betraying lamentable defects of heart or head; some denouncing them as the profane utterances of the skeptic, others as the ravings of the doctrinaire. Both judgments were undeserved; the one because experience teaches us that Providence suffers us, if we will, to ruin both ourselves and those about us, so far as this life is concerned; the other because vast numbers of men make it no secret that they remain bachelors simply because they can not afford to marry. There are, however, objections to Malthus' remedy which are fatal to its general adoption, and these, as I conceive, are as follows: first, it seeks to deprive us, at the very crisis when we are least amenable to reason, of nearly all that cheers and ennobles life, without offering any moral equivalent or any which we are capable of realizing as such. Secondly, it fails to furnish any standard of competence to which we can refer with security, since it prescribes no ascertainable limit to the number of the family, and, therefore, none to the pecuniary wants of the marrying parties. The first objection lies so much on the surface as not to call for any explanation, and all that Malthus had to say on the other head may be summed up in his own words:

"With regard to the expression of later marriages, it should always be recollected that it refers to no particular age, but is entirely comparative. The marriages in England are later than in France, the natural consequence of that prudence and respectability generated by a better government; and can we doubt that good has been the result? The marriages in this country are now later than they were before the Revolution, and I feel firmly persuaded that the increased healthiness observed of late years could not have taken place without this accompanying circumstance. Two or three years in the average age of marriage—by lengthening each generation, and tending in a small degree both to diminish the prolificness of marriages, and the number of born living to be married—may make a considerable difference in the rate of increase, and be

adequate to allow for a considerably diminished mortality. But I would on no account talk of any limits whatever. The only plain and intelligible measure with regard to marriage is the having a fair prospect of being able to maintain a family."

And he subjoins in a note:

"The lowest prospect with which a man can be justified in marrying seems to be the power, when in health, of earning such wages as, at the average price of corn, will maintain the average number of living children to a marriage."

These passages suffice to show the shortcomings of Malthus' teaching. and its powerlessness to grapple with the evils he strove to remove. It is not addressed to the middle classes at all; and, although philosophic minds accept the reasoning as conclusive, the burden of the practice is laid exclusively on the shoulders of those who are least capable of following the argument. A social crusade so conducted is certain to achieve little or nothing. By a strange and unnatural inversion, it sends the weak and helpless to the battle, and leaves the stronger forces idle at home. The poor have many special virtues, but it is too much to expect that in this particular they should have a complete monopoly of wisdom and self-sacrifice. To tell a laboring man who has the chance of a cottage that he is not, on prudential grounds, to think of marrying until he has mastered the law of averages, and that even when he is running a considerable risk, is little else than solemn mockery, and he is entitled to retort that he does not care to be more prudent than his betters. To him a wife is infinitely more necessary than to those of ampler means; for, th public house apart, all his material comforts must be looked for in his own home, while his richer neighbors may satisfy all their wants abroad. It is one thing to have a club-kitchen, and another to have a kitchen for your club. If, indeed, we could all become perfect beings, the rule of life deduced by Malthus from the unalterable law of population, would be both practicable and safe; as it is, it has a direct tendency to

promote the cardinal vice of cities—that of unchastity. The number of women who ply the loathsome trade of prostitution is already large enough to people a county, and, as our great thoroughfares show at nightfall, is certainly not diminishing. Their chief supporters justify themselves by the plea which Malthus uses to enforce the duty of continence, namely, that they are not well enough off to maintain a wife and family. If they could be sure that they could limit the number of their children so as to make it commensurate with their income, not only would the plea be generally groundless, but I believe it would not be urged, and the so-called Social Evil would be stormed in its strongest fortress. The vice itself would become more immoral, because more without excuse, and its greater immorality would, as in the case of other offenses, help to make it more rare. The world at large is only tolerant in matters relating to the sexes where the frailty of human nature makes it necessary that it should be.

Those who have followed me so far will hardly need that I should add more by way of explaining my meaning; and I rejoice to think that there are not a few who are familiar with the moral lesson deducible from these remarks, and whose daily practice it has long since served to shape. It is, however, one thing to entertain a private opinion, which, although we ourselves make it a rule of life, we never impart to others, and another thing to tabulate our ideas on the subject, and publish them to the outside world because we believe that they ought to be more generally held. No great social reform was ever brought about that did not spring from small beginnings. Even those laws of health which appear now most obvious were once nothing more than the registered experiences of a few individuals. Temperance in eating and drinking only becomes a settled habit when we have thoroughly convinced ourselves of its wisdom, either by watching our own sensations, or by imagining the sensations of those whom we have seen suffer from its opposite. As between the different classes of so-

ciety, the higher morality must always filter down from the educated to the uneducated. To hope that the importance of the limitation of numbers will be equally appreciated by the philosopher in his study and the untutored rustic in his cottage, would be preposterous. It would be equally absurd to look for regulative control after marriage among the lower classes. when it is a thing comparatively unknown, and, even where it exists, is almost wholly unrecognized among the higher classes. When a rich man with ten thousand a year thinks himself at liberty to be the father of twelve children, his workman who earns $10 a week can not be expected to restrict himself to two or three.

Many will probably think the practical conclusion to which I point wilder than anything that Malthus ever dreamt, while others will regard it with dislike or pious horror, on moral or religious grounds. To the former I would say, it is premature to predict that any untried experiment will fail until you have shown that the conditions of its success are at variance either with established facts or with ascertained laws. In the case before us, the facts do not belie the conclusion, for, I repeat, there already exists a school of moderation, based on the convictions here stated, which boasts several disciples. I believe there would be vastly more, if the force of public opinion were brought to bear upon the question. Of ascertained laws which are fatal to its success there is absolutely not a trace, except it be the law of our own inclination, which, if in earnest, we can mold as we choose, each strengthening each in the task. At present, however, no one thinks of lifting a finger to assist his neighbor in the matter, and as long as such perfect indifference prevails, and an impenetrable veil of mystery is drawn over the whole subject, every man's secret will perish with him, and the advance of the human race in this all-important department of knowledge will, for want of the power of transmission, be no more rapid than that of the brutes. To those again who raise objections which appear to them to have their root in morality, as distinct

from religion, I answer: It would be entertaining if it were not melancholy to observe the way in which, both in writing and speaking, men are perpetually admitting the material inconveniences due to an excess of population, while they give the go-by to the obvious solution that the numbers of children born after marriage ought to be limited in the manner I have endeavored to indicate.

There is, indeed, a set of feminine thinkers—moralizers rather than moralists—who pretend to an intimate acquaintance with the dispensations of Providence, and, as Mr. Matthew Arnold pithily puts it, speak as familiarly of the Deity "as if he were the man in the next street." The language which they hold is something of this sort: "You who seek to control the destinies of mankind, by arranging so carefully the affair of your family, how do you know you will ever succeed in rearing the two or three children that, in your shallow wisdom, you have prescribed to yourself as your appropriate number? If it should please the Divine Author of their existence to carry them off at one fell swoop, or by what you call accident, your pride of human knowledge would have a proper fall, and you would be forced to bow your head in silence before the heavenly visitation. Bereft in your old age of the solace you had reckoned on, you would then be given up to the anguish of remorse and would weep not only for those you had lost, but for those whom you might have gained. Your sin then would truly have found you out." "My dear madam," I reply, "do you not perceive that this line of reasoning has a double edge? While you remind me of my ignorance, you really give me credit for more knowledge than I can lay claim to. I do not know how to detect the occurrence of these special interferences which you dangle before my eyes like a bugbear. I do not know whether my children will be alive ten years hence, be they few or be they many. I do know that if they are very numerous I shall probably follow one or more of them to their graves, and if you suppose that I shall sorrow less then because the lost ones can be more easily spared, you establish the very

opposite of your own position, by implying that the instinct of parental affection is apt to become fainter, like light, by diffusion over a larger area. It is my duty to foster my parental instinct, which is surely as direct and precious a gift to me as the children which are its object. I refuse to be influenced by any such selfish considerations as those you seem to suggest. If there are two paths before me, I shall choose the one that appears most in keeping with my entire being and with the general good. I can not tell even whether I shall or not outlive my own wife, but as I hold that monogamy is the purest and best form of marriage, I am not going to turn Mormon by way of meeting the contingency."

It is equally futile to attempt, as some do, to cut short the discussion by quoting the old injunction, "Increase and multiply, and replenish the earth," for the cogency of the command has long been exhausted in its fulfillment. "Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them," says the Psalmist, and he adds as a reason, "they shall speak with the enemies in the gate." It would be difficult to show that such a text gives any encouragement to large families at the present day, and it is certain that no poor clerk or parson ever harps on the string of consolation when he surveys the numerous olive branches round about his table. But however apposite the biblical extract may seem, the time is past when the language of a remote age, addressed to a wholly different race, can be detached from its historical surrounding and cited as a rule of modern life. To do this is to extinguish the spirit of the ancient records for the sake of the letter which killeth.

The chief end of marriage, be it said in all thankfulness, is a great deal higher than this. It is a marvelous instrument of education. It develops the sense of moral responsibility, and, therefore, the mainspring of right action, more completely than any other determinant of our lives. It imparts strength to the weaker nature, and softness and moral beauty to the stronger, blessing at once both him that takes and her that gives. The sweet compan-

ionship of well matched minds, whose most potent bond of union lies in the very fact of their difference, is, in itself, almost a Religion; for it quickens the spiritual instincts and enlarges the social sympathies. To refuse marriage to men altogether, or to require them to postpone it indefinitely after the maturity of their judgment has justified their choice, is to inflict an injury on the whole community by encouraging special forms of evil, perhaps even calling them into existence. Many a woman whose daily life is now dedicated to her dress or her household, or who has become so entangled in the narrow meshes of acquaintanceship—which she dignifies by the name of society—as not to have an idea beyond, might have escaped all this bondage if imagined necessity had not doomed her to spinsterhood. Many a man into whose soul has stolen the slow poison of moral and intellectual cynicism, might have retained his early freshness if the example of some friend had not taught him to remain rather than succumb to the yoke of marriage, with its heavy, because uncertain, burdens. Meantime better, perhaps, not to pry too closely into the consolations which he allows himself, or the mode in which he seeks to reconcile what is with what might have been. If, as the phrase runs, the woman is the victim of the man, the man is as much the victim of the prevailing ideas respecting marriage which have raised unbridled license to the level of positive law.

Marriage, followed by the birth of children, stands upon a higher platform than marriage which is wholly unfruitful. Children serve to impart a new impulse to all that is noble in the character of both parents, diverting old feelings into new channels of love. Provided their number is so limited, as that they engage the affections without distracting them, and stimulate the mind without overtaxing it, the result is immeasurably good. Let this boundary line be overstepped, and all is thrown into confusion. That which might have been a source of additional strength becomes a very fountain of weakness, and the blessing is, at least to the eye of the

impartial bystander, turned into a curse. I do not say that the curse is not, in the parent's case occasionally turned back again into a blessing; but it is the blessing which springs from resignation, and not that which springs from hope. The hermit in his wilderness did better than this. If he filled up his cup of misery for himself, he never offered it to others to drink, and at the close of his days he could reflect that he had laid no load on any one else's back. He did not add to the cares of the next generation by an unthinking and needless augmentation of its ranks. He left behind him no representatives for whom society was bound to provide, because, for lack of opportunity or power of push, they were incapable of providing for themselves. He made no contribution to the happiness of the human family, but he certainly did nothing to diminish it.

The conditions of our existence are far more elastic than is commonly believed. I hold that this elasticity consists in the limitation of the number of the family by obedience to natural laws, which all may discover and verify if they will, and that such limitation is as much the duty of married persons as the observance of chastity is the duty of those that are unmarried. One of the main wants of the day is, as I conceive, the formation of a sound public opinion on this subject. Once started, it would gather force rapidly, and at last effect a social revolution of the highest importance—a revolution of which the course would not be traced in blood or riot, but in man's moral, intellectual and material growth. The change can not take its rise in that quarter where it would yield the most beneficial results—among the lowest strata of the people. It must begin, in the first instance, with those above them, and, indeed, with the most educated of these. Let men co-operate to this end, and the opinions here expressed will soon ripen into a creed, which will be the watchword of no sect or party, will fetter no freedom or thought, but be accepted as Nature's teaching, and a symbol of common devotion to the welfare of humanity.

Should the Poor Marry?

The rapid increase of population in our humbler ranks of life is held by many thinkers to be prolific of social evils. As a rule the poor have large families. Rural industries are few, and their wages low. Hence there is a constant influx from the country to the towns, so much so, that a writer recently asserted that no Londoner born and bred could trace for himself three generations of London ancestors. Town occupations are thus overcrowded, and thousands unable to find employment.

To remedy the miseries arising from this state of things numerous schemes have been, from time to time, proposed:—As Emigration, Malthusianism, and Abstention from Marriage. Without discussing at present the remedial value of the two first, we address ourselves to the last-named, especially as the immoral and baleful doctrine—as we consider it—is widely held, that marriage is a luxury to be indulged in by the well-to-do only.

The question, then, whether the poor ought to marry or not is bound to interest many readers. A few observations on the subject may, therefore, be acceptable, particularly as many things have to be considered before a just decision can be drawn; for an act may be legally right and morally wrong or morally right and legally wrong. It may be good for the individual, and bad for the community, or vice versa.

It is impossible to lay down any definite income to indicate what is meant by "poor," because what would be poverty to one would be wealth to another. Any man, no matter how much he possesses, who is pinched and harassed by his requirements, and whose reasonable wants exceed his means of supplying them, is really poor. The Stoic philosophers of old time taught that the way to be rich was to reduce our wants, to dispense with everything which was not necessary to a healthy life. And thus, as the story goes, the cynic Diogenes, who restricted himself to a tub to dwell in, and a wooden bowl for drinking from, threw the latter away when he saw a thirsty soldier drink out of his hands.

But we are none of us Stoics, and very few philosophers. We are mostly practical, matter-of-fact people, who run our wheels in the common ruts, and copy the ways of the world. We want to live, and live respectably, after the fashion of our fellows, and the question really intended is—Would people of very limited incomes be better or worse for marrying?

Before we could answer this, we should want to know what sort of people they are. If they have small incomes and extravagant habits or tastes, or if they are deficient in energy and business aptitude, or even in moral principles, then they had far better remain single. But if they are the converse of all these, marriage will not only be suitable, but highly desirable. Paradoxical as it may seem, a good and thrifty wife would make the late bachelor's income go farther for two than for one. Her deft and ready fingers would, at the same time, multiply his comforts. Her thrifty and careful habits would prove the safest guardians of his humble store.

We presume, of course, that the marriage is prompted by love, otherwise it is likely to be a failure. Only rich people can venture to marry without it, as they have other compensations, of which we do not approve, but which they often seem to imagine suits them just as well.

To our thinking a loveless marriage is not only an unnatural union, but is sheer folly or downright wickedness. People will sometimes say, "Oh, but love will come after marriage." Very rarely. The chances are too many against it. An intelligent and mutual affection, however, is in itself marriage, and we must not be led away by supposing that a ceremony can ever be anything more than a ceremony.

There are others reasons why poor people of suitable dispositions, as mentioned, should marry. Marriage calls forth all the latent good that may be in them. It enlarges their sympathies and their hopes; it gives incentive to action and solidity to character; it steadies the wavering, and saves those who would otherwise be lost. The home may be poorly furnished, and wanting in many things, but love brightens and cheers the humblest cottage. And, after all, it is a real home, where two brave souls cherish and comfort each other. And when the children come, the parents have ripened by experience, and have discovered the means whereby to provide for them. Often, too, they come as God's angels, to heal a wounded heart or to strengthen a weak spirit.

Thus, poor and rich are not absolute, but relative terms. For man is not nourished by bread alone, but by thought and action, and innocent pleasures, and above all by sympathy. The confirmed bachelor is apt to develop a hard and selfish nature; the old maid is too likely to become sour and crusty; and not because their characters are worse than those of others, but because their circumstances have not been favorable for the growth of their higher feelings. True marriage is often like Moses' rod, which smote the hard rock and refreshing waters gushed forth. They were hidden, pent up, waiting for the friendly touch that should free them.

Of course a certain measure of prudence should be exercised before engaging in marriage. A man should see his way to fulfilling all reasonable responsibilities, and in so important a matter —the most important of his life—should weigh well what he is

about to do. As a rule, the character of his wife is of more consequence than the amount of his income. If the latter would be sufficient in the hands of a prudent and domesticated woman, and he is attached to such a one in mutual love, then the sooner they marry the better. Let them do so in the bloom of life, and enjoy each other's society while hope and energy are strong, and not wait until the world has embittered them or crushed out all the happy buoyancy of their youth. There is another advantage in early mariage, their children will have grown up before they themselves have passed middle age, and will be able, perhaps, to have the felicity of returning their parents' care by assisting them should their old age need it.

By far too much is made of the difference between rich and poor. Those who have experienced both states know that human happiness is much the same in each. Wealth has its drawbacks as well as poverty, and possibly if at the close of life we could all add up correctly, we should find that the balance of happiness is rather on the side of the poor. If their sorrows are sharp their joys are keener, and their power of endurance greater. They never experience that satiety of living which comes from satiety of pleasure. They could not understand the pangs of povety in the breast of that luxurious Roman who committed suicide because he had only £80,000 left. Simple habits and natural taste are far more conducive to enjoyment than many are aware of. Every-day duty gives a zest for harmless recreation, and many a good-natured father, who takes his little ones of a Sunday for a quiet stroll in a country lane, when the hawthorn or the honey-suckle is in bloom, derives more solid happiness from this than if he were a prince and played at Monte Carlo.

It is the custom nowadays to flatter the working classes by ascribing to them all the virtues. But those are not their true friends who do this. Every class has its own virtues and vices, and the working class has its. They would do well to remember

that political suffrage does not give political wisdom, and that a restricted education must produce a restricted intelligence. Their improved condition will depend not on extraneous assistance, not on Acts of Parliament, nor the nostrums of economical and political quacks, but on themselves. They must set themselves a higher standard of education, and a higher code of morality before they can make any considerable advance. Only those who live in a fool's paradise believe in the power of Parliaments to effect a great social reform, which, like that of an individual, must proceed from within. Drink, for instance, is the greatest hindrance to their prosperity, and the happiness of their married lives. Many think that, if all the public-houses were closed by Act of Parliament, England would be changed from a drunken to a sober nation. This is pure delusion. The fanatics of the State of Maine caused it to be tried there by law, but Mr. Justin McCarthy has given us his experience of the working of this Act. People drank as much as before, and Mr. McCarthy found no difficulty in getting his native whiskey anywhere, even on a Sunday. We deplore intoxication even as much as Sir Wilfrid Lawson does, but we do not think Englishmen and Irishmen will ever suffer themselves to be dragooned into becoming teetotallers or anything else. Although the poor frequently undergo many unavoidable privations, the necessaries of life are cheap, and wages higher than on the Continent. There they find no difficulty in marrying. This seems to require some explanation from those concerned. Can it be true, as Mons. Louis Blouet (Max O'Rell), author of "John Bull and his island," said in his lecture at Westbourne Park, some time ago, that much harm arises from the desire of the poor to ape the class above them? This, he said, prevails in England much more than on the Continent. There a poor man is not ashamed to go to church in his blouse, and servant girls do not attempt to vie with their mistresses in airs and dress, as they do here. We regret the loss of that modest humility which was once the grace of the

poor—that honesty of deportment which preserved them from affecting to be other than they were. Even in these revolutionary times there are some things worth preserving.

Should poor people marry? As well ask, should the course of labor stand still? Should the grass grow in our streets, and the cobwebs rot on our walls? Should the lands lie untilled, and the seas unploughed? Should the shuttle cease, and the anvil be silent? In a word, should famine and pestilence, hunger and fury, desolation sway as of old? For all these would happen were the sons and daughters of labor to cease breeding the workers of our industrial hives. Let none despise labor, nor be ashamed of it. It is the foundation of all dignity, all goodness, and all true happiness. It is only idleness that is contemptible.

And if, in the great battle with and against the forces of Nature, thousands, enfeebled by fight, or folly, fall out of the ranks as paupers, the workers must not on that account be discouraged, nor despise their lot. The rich have their paupers as well as the poor. As a rule, their eldest sons inherit their father's wealth, and the younger are thrown upon the resources of their country. Most of the good things in the Army, Navy and Church fall to the poor of high connections. It is only rarely that superior ability is allowed to take precedence of incompetent rank. But we shall change all that before long. There are good times in store for the poor, if they will prepare themselves to use them wisely. Whenever they can perceive the suicidal folly of strikes and the futility of multiplied laws; when they acquire generally that love of morality which teaches that only honest work deserves honest payment, and learn to scorn the man who scamps his duty as they would any other vulgar cheat; when they regard women with greater respect, and are kinder to their own; when they free themselves from the indulgence of filthy language and debasing habits, and find that pleasure in intellectual pursuits which the best of them have already found; when they see that to be free the rights of all must

be respected alike, then the economic and social problems which afflict us now will have been solved. Honesty and morality will bless every household. "The Cottage Homes of England" will be happy homes; marriage will be regarded as the sacred birthright of all. Good Charles Mackay, the poor man's poet, who wrote "There's a good time coming, boys: wait a little longer," also wrote—

"For every up there is a down,
For every folly shame;
And retribution follows guilt
As burning follows flame.

If wrong you do, if false you play,
In summer among the flowers;
You must atone, you shall repay,
In winter among the showers."

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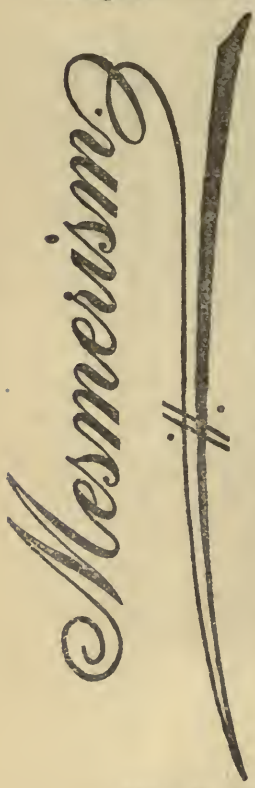

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